

By
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To God Nothing Is Impossible!

Many centuries ago, Bishop Samonas of Gaza led a group of pilgrims to Jerusalem, when a group of Muslims decided to publicly make a fool of him by asking questions about the Holy Eucharist that they thought couldn't be answered. "How is it possible for bread and wine to become the body and blood of Christ?" one of them asked. The bishop answered, "You have grown since you were a child and have more flesh and blood than you did then. If your body can change food and drink into flesh and blood, then surely God can do that too."

"But how is it possible for Christ to be present entirely in a small host?" asked another. The bishop glanced at the sky then at the holy city of Jerusalem, and then replied, "The landscape with the heavens above it is something very large, while your eye is very small. Yet your tiny eye contains in itself the whole big picture. Why should it be impossible for Christ to be present entirely in one little piece of bread?"

Once more the first Muslim spoke up. "How, then, is it possible for the same body of Christ to be present in all your churches at the same time?" The bishop answered: "In a large mirror your image is reflected once. When you break that mirror into a hundred pieces, you see the same image of yourself in each of the fragments, don't you? Then why should it be impossible for the body of Christ to be present in many places at once? To God nothing is impossible!"

There's always a smart aleck or two around to try to mock our beliefs. In this case, the bishop gave spiffy and thought provoking answers to the questions meant to embarrass and trip him up. In order to give thoroughly convincing answers to the Muslims' barbs, Bishop Samonas would've had to prove that Jesus Christ is God—the second Person of the Blessed Trinity—but that's a whole different discussion. You and I already know that, though, but it'd probably benefit all of us if we looked a bit deeper into why we believe the things the Muslims couldn't understand.

We believe in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist because He promised to give us His flesh as food and His blood as drink. Now we'll demonstrate why we Catholics believe this.

St. Luke begins his narrative of the Last Supper with, "And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer...'" The immediate question that comes to mind is, why would Jesus be so anxious to have this singular meal with His apostles when He knows that this will be his last meal? Does a death row inmate look forward to his last meal? Of course not, but that's what this is. So why is Jesus actually looking forward to His last meal? To answer this we need to begin read the sixth chapter of John.

In order to set the stage for His Eucharistic narrative, John begins the sixth chapter with three miracles performed by Jesus, the greater of which is His feeding 5,000 people on a few fish and loaves of bread. Obviously, John wanted to emphasize the divinity of Jesus.

Because the people wanted to be with Jesus, they spent the night going around the Sea of Capernaum to where the apostles would land their boat, because they knew that Jesus would eventually show up wherever the apostles were. They were amazed to see Jesus with the apostles, since they knew He didn't get into the boat with them.

When Jesus' followers found Him after spending all night looking, they asked how He got to the place where they found Him. Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves..." Then Jesus went on to begin telling them what they had to do to inherit eternal life.

Although ordinarily a wonderfully innovative people, the Jews of Jesus' day were theological airheads. They asked, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you." It's unbelievable that the Jews would challenge Jesus after the miracle of feeding them all the day before. Astonishing! Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." He went on to explain that He was the bread sent from heaven by the Father. Up to that point, Jesus' followers understood him to be speaking symbolically. But He went on to tell them that *He* was the bread they'd have to eat to inherit eternal life.

The Jews then said, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus responded, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life... For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, so he who eats me will live because of me."

No longer did Jesus' followers believe He was being symbolic. They now understood Him to be speaking literally. He said, "my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed"; the word "indeed" made His statement imperative. He prefaced His entire statement with the phrase "truly, truly," which He always used to emphasize the importance of what He was about to teach. The followers' literal understanding of what Jesus said repulsed them: "After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him."

If they misunderstood by taking Jesus' words literally, why didn't He stop them and explain what He meant? Any other time they misunderstood He'd explain, so why not now? He didn't go after them because He intended for them to take Him literally!

Jesus said to the twelve, "Will you also go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, you are the holy one of God."

The apostles had been with Him from the beginning. They also understood what He said to be literal. They didn't know how He'd do what He said, but they believed that He'd eventually show them.

Jesus finally explained the how to them at the Last Supper. In Luke 22:15 Jesus said, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." He had earnestly desired to give them His flesh and blood since He first made the promise. In verses 16-20, Jesus proceeded to give them what He had promised at the first Mass.

These passages, as well as others, explain why Catholics believe in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ and the Holy Eucharist. The short of it is that we believe in the Real Presence because Jesus said so! That's What We Believe... Why We Believe It.